

Metre and meaning in two poems by Ilpo Tiihonen

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Abstract. Metre and meaning intertwine in manifold ways. The aim of this paper is to discuss the interplay between the metric and semantic structures in poetry in the light of the work of a Finnish poet, Ilpo Tiihonen. Throughout his career, which started in the 1970s, he has been one of the few Finnish contemporary poets to make constant use of metric structures and rhyme. The article also aims to shed some light on questions that arise when metrical poetry is translated from one language into another, in this case from Finnish into English.

The metrical development of Finnish poetry

In order to understand the context of Finnish poetry in general and Ilpo Tiihonen's position in its metrical tradition in particular, we must first take a brief look at the origins of Finnish verse. Originally, Finnish folk poetry was cast in unrhymed, non-strophic trochaic tetrameters. After the title of the Finnish national epic *The Kalevala*, compiled by Elias Lönnrot from oral folk poetry collected by himself and others and first published in 1835, this metre is called the Kalevala metre. As Senni Timonen (2002: 13) has aptly pointed out, Elias Lönnrot textualized oral literature when he compiled the epic.

Heikki Laitinen (2003: 14) writes about the "metrical consciousness" of a language and points out that several thousand years ago it was born and developed orally, "in song and through song". Music and poetry as different fields became separated much later, and research, unfortunately, has – according to Laitinen – often also forgotten the substantial connection between the two. Metrical research, it must be remembered, strives to investigate this sometimes neglected common ground. Also, recent research on the value of sound in the creation of poetic meaning has stimulated debate on

this often neglected topic (see, e.g., the volume *The Sound of Poetry, the Poetry of Sound*, 2009).

The Kalevala metre, then, developed hand in hand with the Finnish language. Not only was it used in the sung epic, lyric, ritual verse and recited magic spells, but the direct speech in prose tales and stories was often in the same metre, as were various common expressions and rhymes (Leino 1986: 129). It constitutes its own metrical system, which is surprisingly complex despite its apparent simplicity. The metre is basically trochaic tetrameter, but a poem or a song in this metre is rhythmically lively and varied. The main reason for this is that this metre requires the placing of a short stressed syllable in a falling position, which gives rise to a marked conflict between the metre and its linguistic realisation.¹ (Leino 1986: 12.) Therefore, the Kalevala metre is based both on syllabic prominence and syllabic length and is difficult to transpose into other languages.

Epic and lyric songs in the non-strophic, non-rhyming but strongly alliterative Kalevala metre were sung as late as the 20th century in certain parts of Eastern Finland. Simultaneously, from the 17th century onwards, the western metrical tradition with its rhymed, strophic metre advanced and became the leading form of poetry.

The status of the Kalevala metre and its gradual retreat manifest Finland's position on the borderline between the eastern and western traditions of culture, social life, religion and history. Because of this, the evolution of Finnish metrics reflects a complex interplay of linguistic and cultural pressures (Hanson, Kiparsky 1996: 325). In the mid-19th century, Finland was under Russian rule and national romantic ideas about an independent state were only gradually coming into being. Towards the end of the century Russian pressure intensified and Finnish cultural circles, as well as other levels of society, fought for the rights to art, culture and a social life in the Finnish language. During these decades, poetry sung and written in Finnish took on great importance, and metrics became an issue of debate. The issues became politicized.

When *The Kalevala* and Lönnrot's companion to it, the collection of lyrical verse titled *Kanteletar*, were published in 1835 and 1840, respectively, written

¹ Considering the sphere and focus of this article, we have neither the opportunity nor space to discuss the Kalevala metre in more detail. Leino (1986: 129–142) affords a detailed presentation of the metre in English; see, also, Gasparov 1996: 256–258.

literature in Finnish was only starting to emerge.² In contrast to Lönnrot, some other leading figures in Finnish literary and cultural life urged poets to adopt Indo-European metres in order to follow the paths shown by “Goethe, Shakespeare and others”.³ For them, Indo-European models manifested Finland’s political belonging in Europe not only with regard to literary traditions that could be traced back to classical antiquity, but also concerning Finland’s Western orientation as a whole. Lönnrot for his part found that Finnish poetry should be developed further on the basis of the Kalevala metre and its manifold rhythmic structures. He lost the battle, and it took half a century before the first high-quality collection of poetry in the Kalevala metre, Eino Leino’s *Helkavirret*, was published in 1903.

After the metrical debate in the mid-1800s, Indo-European metres dominated Finnish poetry for almost a century and poetic Modernism reached Finland relatively late. Although its roots can be traced back to as early as the late 19th century and certain Modernist movements were active in the early decades of the 20th century, the final and decisive breakthrough of Modernism occurred only in the 1950s.⁴ Then – much later than in most European literatures – a strong metrical revolution took place in Finnish poetry, pushing the traditional verse form back to the margins and bringing the modernist style to the fore.

In the late 1940s and during the 1950s, a group of young poets made their debut, using free rhythms and strong imagery. Among them were Eeva-Liisa Manner, Paavo Haavikko and Tuomas Anhava. From the 1950s onwards, metric structures were almost totally abandoned and the mainstream of Finnish poetry was written in non-rhyming free verse. However, some poets (such as P. Mustapää and Aale Tynni) continued to write metrical poetry as a poetry that combined free rhythms with metrical elements. Ilpo Tiihonen can be regarded as continuing this tradition. Therefore, a discussion of his usage of metre also sheds some light on the whole situation in a poetic field where free

² In 1851, the first professorship of Finnish language was established at the University of Helsinki and Finnish was accepted as a language of tuition in the same University. Until then, the upper classes in Finnish society had been Swedish-speaking, and Swedish continued to be the official language of government and administration.

³ For a more detailed discussion, see Laitinen 2003: 163–203 and Grünthal 1999: 316–321.

⁴ For an overview of the metrical and structural history of Finnish poetry in English, see Laitinen 2001.

rhythms dominate and metrical expression is in danger of being interpreted as old-fashioned, “light” and superficial.

Of course, it is important to remember that in popular verse and in song lyrics, metrical forms flourished throughout the non-metrical decades of written literary poetry. That means they have never really vanished from the “metrical consciousness” of the Finnish audience. Also, so as not to give an out-of-date impression of Finnish poetry, it must be noted that metrical forms have generated new interest among poets and scholars during the last decades.

Ilpo Tiihonen: between metre and free verse

The Finnish poet Ilpo Tiihonen (b. 1950) debuted in 1975 and has up to the present (2010) published seventeen collections of poetry. Some of his poetry has also been translated into English.⁵ In addition to poetry, Tiihonen has written plays, musicals, librettos, radio plays and children’s books, and translated literature from other languages.

Tiihonen is an author of contrasts: his style extends from the colloquial to the romantically poetic. It is typical of him to merge slang and current jargon with dialect words and poeticisms (Lomas 1993: 8). In the 1970s, when he commenced his career as a poet, the prevailing form of Finnish poetry was, as stated above, non-metrical, favouring short form, simple imagery and closeness to everyday speech. He was one of the few of his generation to break away from the dominant free verse style: from his first collection onwards, and in the decades during which metre was looked upon as old-fashioned and out of date, Tiihonen experimented with metrical forms and rhyme.

The majority of Ilpo Tiihonen’s poems make use of metre, but in an original way, seeking means to loosen tight structures and find a natural, speech-like rhythm. Today, he can be regarded as one of the leading figures in modern Finnish metrical expression, continuing the metrical tradition, simultaneously modifying and renewing it. His metrical and rhythmic solutions have allusive functions in relation to earlier poets; he is a poet keenly aware of the metrical

⁵ For Tiihonen’s poetry in the English translation, see *Black and Red. Selected Poems*, www.booksfromfinland.fi and www.electricverses.net. In both the anthology and on the websites, Tiihonen’s poems have been translated by the English poet and translator Herbert Lomas whose comments on the poet’s work can be accessed at <http://www.finlit.fi/booksfromfinland/bff/398/tiihon1.htm>.

history of Finnish poetry and is capable of using their metrics in ironic, parodic as well as respectful ways. He plays with contrasts and makes innovative use of rhyme and assonance, creating words of his own. His metre is often closely tied to the semantic structure of his poems.

In this paper, I discuss two poems by Tiihonen that are metrically interesting for separate reasons. First, a couple of stanzas from the long poem “Kesäillan kevyt käsitteellisyys” will be considered. This example sheds light on Tiihonen’s allusive and experimental usage of language, although the poem can also be read as a comment on the effects of metre.

The poem seems to have an obvious rhythm, which, however, cannot be satisfyingly described in the frameworks of structuralist metrical theory as outlined by Roman Jakobson, Juri Lotman and Mikhail Gasparov. This school makes a clear distinction between metre (the invariant) and rhythm (the variant) and, consequently, between accentual and syllabic-accentual metres. It does not accept hybrid metrical forms like iambic-anapestic or trochaic-dactylic variations. In contrast to this view, Finnish metrical studies, decisively outlined and practised by Pentti Leino (1982, 1986), have treated both accentual and syllabic-accentual metres in the framework of dynamic metres, varying only in the number of syllables accepted in weak metrical positions (upbeats) between strong positions (downbeats).

In the following metrical analysis of Tiihonen’s “Kesäillan kevyt käsitteellisyys” I aim to test the concept of accentual metre (or, in Gerard Manley Hopkins’ terms, sprung rhythm⁶). As mentioned above, Finnish metrical studies have so far more or less passed this metrical form and seen it as a variation of accentual-syllabic metres.⁷ It is possible, however, that the concept of accentualism helps us grasp the rhythmical scheme of poems that follow other than strict syllable-bound principles. If so, the concept of accentual metre might turn out to be a useful tool for analysing the vast scale of Finnish poetry between strict metrical forms and free verse.

⁶ See Jakobson 1981: 29; Hollander 2001: 21–22 as well as Carper and Attridge 2003: 134 call this phenomenon stress verse. In the Russian tradition, the term ‘dolnik’ is used (see, for example Tarlinskaja 1995).

⁷ See Viikari 1987: 165–173 on some early experiments in accentual metre. Liukkonen (1993: 24–27) discusses some poems by the modernist Tuomas Anhava in the light of accentual metre. See also Leino (1982) on the concept of ‘mora’.

After “Kesäillan kevyt käsitteellisyys”, I turn to the poem “Muse”, which provides a background for other types of metrical and semantic questions.⁸

The “symphony”

Tiihonen has dedicated the poem “Kesäillan kevyt käsitteellisyys” in “Suvi-simfonia” (“A summer evening’s slight conceptualness”, the third and last poem in his sequence with the meaningfully misspelt title “Summer symphony”) to the Finnish poet and author Joel Lehtonen (1881–1934). Lehtonen, like Tiihonen himself, attempted to find a natural, speech-like rhythm by means of metre.⁹ Also, the parodic usage of poetic address was typical of Lehtonen, and Tiihonen makes ample use of this in his poem at hand.

The poem is an ecstatic ode in which the speaker addresses all possible – and impossible – animals, creatures and features of summer. The addresser gets carried away by smells, visions and the sounds of life, growth and sexuality, all present in the stress-free scenery of summer.

I quote the two last stanzas of the 10-stanza poem “A summer evening’s slight conceptualness” first in Herbert Lomas’s translation,¹⁰ then in the original:

Oh microscopic wormy mouldiness
 dandelions’ sunny harvest of godliness
 the headland’s swaying hayfulness
 witchgrass’s whimsical playfulness
 and sheep-sorrel’s sweet tastiness!
 Oh the saliva-licking of all unchasteness
 hot musk-orchid’s scented headiness
 passion flowers’ glad gift of unsteadiness
 and the minty gluiness of sticky lipfulness

yes, and at the edge of happiness, thistliness.

⁸ In this discussion, I understandably restrict myself to those poems that are also available in English translation. So far a total of 29 translations out of the 16 collections (and hundreds of poems) of Ilpo Tiihonen have appeared in English. There are also translations into Swedish and Italian (see www.electricverses.net).

⁹ For a closer investigation of Lehtonen’s speech-like rhythms, see Viikari 1985, 1987.

¹⁰ Lomas notes in his translation that it was made with the assistance of Soila Lehtonen.

But detail by detail the cosmic interdependenceness
 and ref by ref its green inter-referenceness
 sing the appendixness of human songfulness
 Oh all the heiferiness, humanness, hoveringness
 wafting cloud-loftiness, lofty melodiousness –
 our heavenly household's wallhung wise-sayingness –
 oh summer cradling us, its total cradlingness.

Next, we see the same stanzas in Finnish. In order to scan the rhythm of the poem, all stressed syllables (main stresses and secondary stresses likewise) are marked in boldface, while line endings (which are all stressed) are underlined. Word division into syllables is marked with a stroke.¹¹

Oi **mik**/ros/**koop**/pi/nen **mul**/ta/va **ma**/to/**us**
 voi/**kuk**/ki/en **au**/rin/ko/**sa**/to/**us**
pien/ta/**ril**/li/nen **hei**/nyys, sen **huo**/jah/ta/**vuus**
 ja **juo**/la/**hei**/ni/en **mie**/leen/**juo**/lah/ta/**vuus**
 ja **suo**/la/**hei**/n/ien **su**/loi/nen **suo**/lai/**suus**
 Oi **kaik**/ki **rak**/kai/den **kie**/lel/lä **kuo**/lai/**suus**
 kuin **lem**/men/**vuok**/ko/jen **tuok**/su/jen **vu**o/lai/**suus**
 ja **me**/si/**hei**/ni/en **huu**/maa/va **kii**/mal/li/**suus**
 ja **huu**/li/**kuk**/kas/ten **mel**/kein/pä **lii**/mal/li/**suus**

niin, ja **on**/nen **lai**/dal/la **oh**/dak/kei/**suus**
 Vaan **koh**/ta **koh**/dal/ta **kaik**/keu/den **koh**/dak/kei/**suus**
 ja **vii**/te **viit**/teel/tä **vih**/re/ä **viit**/teel/li/**syys**
 soi **ih**/mis/**lau**/lu/jen **liit**/teel/li/**syys**!
 Oi **kaik**/ki **leh**/mi/syys, **ih**/mi/syys, **lei**/jal/li/**suus**
 ja **pil**/vi/**kor**/ke/us, **kor**/keu/den **lau**/lul/li/**suus**
 kuin **tai**/vas/**huo**/neem/me **huo**/neen/**tau**/lul/li/**suus**
 oi **ke**/sän **hei**/jal/le/**rii**, **kaik**/ki **hei**/jal/li/**suus**!¹²

¹¹ In Finnish, the words are written as they are pronounced, and therefore every syllable is heard. In the Finnish language, primary stress always falls on the initial syllable of the word, and in words longer than three syllables, secondary stress lies basically on every second syllable. In compound words, the first syllable of the latter compound part is stressed.

¹² The last line forms an exception to the rest of the poem. It consists of two hemistichs and could also be scanned as two separate units with a pause in the middle: “oi **ke**/sän **hei**/jal/le/**rii**, **kaik**/ki **hei**/jal/li/**suus**!” It is rather typical for last lines to stand out from the rest of the poem.

Finnish is an agglutinative language, that is, it is morphologically rich. There is a manifold system of inflection and derivation, and a great number of productive derivative suffixes. Tiihonen's poem makes ample, perhaps overwhelming, use of the suffixes -us/-ys and -suus/-syys (attached to derived adjectives), creating lexical innovations nonexistent in standard language.

The Finnish original is based on a rather regular rhythmical scheme. Due to the derivational method described above and due to many innovative compound words, Tiihonen's poem ends up containing a high number of long words with three syllables or more. Actually, the trisyllabic words consisting of a stressed first syllable and two unstressed syllables which follow, recurrent especially in the middle positions of the lines, create the impression of a dance rhythm, namely that of waltz. In the rhythm of the poem, there is a clear contrast between shorter (stressed/unstressed) and longer (stressed/unstressed/unstressed) rhythmical units.

Line endings in the poem are very prominent: all lines end with long words with the highest possible degree of repetitive suffixes. There are hardly any enjambments (one occurs in the Finnish stanzas quoted above) and almost every line consists of an address to something rather peculiar: *lipfullness*, *appendixness*, *cradlingness*.

The highly monotonous and predictable rhymes stand in stark contrast to the strange and surprising meanings of the rhyming words: neologisms created by the use of suffixes. Some, even many of the rhyming words in the original are almost identical, differing only in initial consonant (*suolaisuus-kuolaisuus-vuolaisuus*; *viitteellisyys-liitteellisyys*), producing much assonance in the lines. There is a high proportion of sound repetition in the poem, but according to Jakobson (1981: 38), rhyme should never be treated from the standpoint of sound only: it necessarily involves a semantic relationship between the rhyming units. In Tiihonen's poem, this semantic relationship is tied to many unexpected concepts. Jakobson (1981: 39) treats rhyme as a condensed case of parallelism, which he, following the notions of Gerald Manley Hopkins, sees as the fundamental question of poetry. Also other levels of parallelism (i.e. syntactic, phonetic and semantic) are very explicit in the poem.

For these reasons, the poem, following the same principles throughout its ten stanzas, creates simultaneously an extremely repetitive and utterly unexpected textual combination: predictable on the structural level, yet

surprising on the semantic level, at times approaching a nonsensical tone.¹³ As there is insecurity regarding the nonsensical meaning and uncertainty of line groupings, the security generated by phonetic and morphological predictability at line endings becomes “false”. The poem does not call itself “a symphony” for nothing.

But why all this symphonic abundance of sound, rhyme and derivation? In the Finnish original, the dancing rhythm mentioned above is iconic as regards the spirit of the poem: the further the poem develops, the merrier the speaker’s intoxication with the leisure of summer becomes. It is fascinating to observe how this empowering state of creative freedom and ecstasy is described within a tightly structured metre and form.

Tiihonen’s poem makes us very aware of its medium: its language, metre and rhythm. The poem plays on words: it resembles a machine, generating one concept after another, according to the same model. It is the metre, rhythm and derivative suffixes that are the main generators of speech in the poem, rather than the “sense” or “meaning” of what is being said. As Waldrop (2009: 60) points out, a string of words related by sound may make an argument stronger than logic.

We are dealing with abundant accumulation and over-determination where, as Michael Riffaterre (1983: 39) has noted, words “become synonyms of one another irrespective of their original meaning in ordinary language”. The repetitive structures of the lines (on metrical, syntactic and semantic levels) and their functionally equivalent expressions suggest a similarity among the lines (Riffaterre 1983: 34). As Amitai Aviram (1994: 51) points out, language is rendered meaningless through repetition, and we see this process taking place in “A summer evening’s slight conceptualness”.

Most of the words generated by derivational suffixes are neologisms. According to Riffaterre (1983: 74), neologisms are the most strongly motivated signifiers of a text, because they are motivated either by a morphological and semantic sequence, or by two semantic sequences, or then again, by a more complex combination, which is not the case with pre-existent words. In Tiihonen’s poem, we are dealing with morphological and semantic motivation. Lexical innovations suspend the automatism of perception, and

¹³ According to Reuven Tsur (1996: 70), too much predictability in the rhyme pattern sometimes arouses a feeling of uncertainty that, coupled with the certainty of predictable rhythm, generates the “spell-weaving” or “trance-inducing” effect of hypnotic poetry. Ilpo Tiihonen’s poem may be called hypnotic in its ample repetitiveness.

force the reader to become aware of the form of the message (Riffaterre 1983: 62). Tiihonen's neologisms serve the same aim: they refer to their own structure, as well as the structure of the text from which they are derived, rather than to reality. Their function is to condense the dominant characteristics of the text (Riffaterre 1983: 74).

Traditional metrical and rhyming poetry was criticized by the Finnish modernists for being superficial and twanging, for giving more weight to rhyme than to meaning. Keeping this background in mind, Tiihonen's poem takes rhyming logic to the extreme. Far from creating nonsense, the overabundant use of rhyme and neologisms overdetermine the symphonic, musical nature of the poem (cf. Perloff 2009: 101). Words as meaningful concepts are not decisive, but are just an instrument in the poetical music created in order to transmit a certain rhythm, feeling, mood or state of mind. We are turning from the logical and cognitive spheres of language to its bodily (also called "material") spheres of sounds and movements, where "meaning" can be felt but not unambiguously explained by words. Tiihonen's poem could also be defined as sound poetry, in which rhythm and sound are more powerful than the meaning of words (see Perloff 2009). According to Aviram (1994: 24), rhythm in poetry may be more important than words, giving expression to the unspeakable.¹⁴

Muse

In classical antiquity, muses were goddesses of dance, song and music. Later they became the guardians of all arts and science and symbols for art and creation. In the history of poetry, poems addressed to muses have been playing an important role.

In 1994, Ilpo Tiihonen published a collection of poems by that name, *Muusa* (*The Muse*). Both the real and the symbolic Muse – and the tension between them – are present in the title poem of the collection and essential to understanding it:

¹⁴ Following the interpretative threads of the "unspeakable" and "bodily" aspects of poetry and art understandably leads us away from the pure structuralist path. These two schools of thought can, however, also enrich each other's thinking.

I'll make a long sentence, springy and spacious
and wrap everything in, everything I meet –
that morning mood of yours, the bread, the children's
trumpetings,
and the lead bullet that melts in a word or two, after all.

I'll make a long sentence, long, and let it carry its body,
so even if I don't know its meaning, not a word –
I'll know your ringless ear, the silver of your breath,
and beyond the horizon I'll discern the lines on your palm.

That sentence's shine, scents, weights. And the shock
when some friend wanders off into the silence.
The sentence's trails and peaks, the love of looking
when our great task fits into one look.

And I'll go through you, the words will fill and light will
spread
as today too our thousand-year-old seconds explode –
I'll gather the fragments of you from earth to heaven,
I'll suck your blood from my fingers when I wrote.

And in the Finnish original, main stresses marked in bold script:¹⁵

Teen **pitkän** lauseen, **taipuisan**,
sen **aamun** **tuulesi** ja **leivän**, **lasten** **ään**ten **trumpetin**
ja **kurkustani** **lyijy**kuulan **joka** **sulaa**
pariin **sanaan**, **sittenkin**

teen **pitkän** lauseen, **pitkän**, **kaukaa**
kantakoon se **ruumistaan**
niin **vaikken** **tietäis** **tarkoitusta**, **sanankaan**.
Vain sun **korvas** **koruttoman** **tunnen**,
hengitykses **hopean**,
ja **horisontin** **takaa** **vielä** **kämmenviivas** **erotan**.

Sen lauseen **läike**, **tuoksu**, **punnukset**. Ja **vavahdu**
kun **joku tuttavista äänettämiin erkanee**.

Sen lauseen **laahukset** ja **huiput**, ja **silmän rakkaus**
kun **suuri tehtävämmä mahtuu yhteen katseeseen**.

¹⁵ Here, in contrast to “A summer evening’s slight conceptualness”, only main stresses are marked. “Muse” differs from the preceding example by its more speech-like rhythm.

¹⁸ The adverb *sittenkin* (nevertheless) between the first and second stanzas of the Finnish original is ambiguous: syntactically, it can be read to refer either to the first or the latter part of the sentence.

combine them even in places in which there would naturally be full stops. This adds to the speech-like rhythm of the poem: in spoken language, long on-going units are common, and we can see similar examples in the poem.¹⁹ However, as the poem continues we understand that “sentence” here means much more than just a syntactic entity.

In both the Finnish and the English version, the shortest sentences are to be found in the third stanza. Now, the topic is death (“And the shock / when some friend wanders off into the silence.”), and the dramatic subject matter is reflected in the peculiar sentence structure of the stanza. The speaker uses an elaborate noun phrase without a predicate plus a subordinate clause, which creates a more colloquial and immediate tone than that in the other stanzas. Also, the abrupt sentence rhythm reflects the affectiveness of the subject and the speaker’s difficulty speaking about it.

In the English translation of “Muse” we observe long lines with no rhyme words. There tend to be five downbeats in each line, and many of the lines seem to imitate the long, waving rhythm of the original poem by starting with a longer statement followed by a comma, and a shorter ending to the line. The translation is divided into four stanzas like the original.

The translator has preserved the strong repetitive structure of the poem. The alliterations, though, are not as frequent as in the original, yet we do find, for example, *sentence–scent–silence*; *shine–shock*; *weights–wanders*. As a whole, we are left with the impression that the translator has decided to concentrate on textual meaning and, by sticking mostly to five downbeats per line, chosen a more regular rhythmic structure than that of the original.²⁰

Both the original poem and its translation strive towards speech-like rhythm. According to Derek Attridge, a line with five accents does not bring with it the sense of a strong underlying rhythm, and for this reason it strikes the ear as faithful to the natural rhythm of speech (Attridge 1982: 126). For example, the iambic pentameter line predominates in Shakespeare’s plays, and his lines are considered to sound very “spoken” (Carper, Attridge 2003: 58–59).

¹⁹ According to Leino (1982: 294), long lines take a poem closer to prose rhythm.

²⁰ In a short essay on Tiihonen, Herbert Lomas (1998) describes his thoughts about translating Tiihonen’s poetry and says: “As for translation, that’s always been difficult with Tiihonen for his form, his slang, his colloquialisms, his word-play, his tone. – It’s not form but idiom that’s the problem: finding constructs that will produce the right balance between *faux-naïveté* and sophistication.”

Metric and semantic structures of "Muse"

Next, let us have a look at how the metric structure and the semantic structure are combined in the poem. The speaker is simultaneously present in two realities: first, sitting at the breakfast table together with his wife; and second, looking at the situation from the outside as a poet, drawing allegories between his everyday life and the poetic world. He is pondering on the act of writing and the act of creation as a whole. Thus, the poem is clearly metapoetic: it shows us a real-life situation on one level and an allegory of poetic writing on the other.²¹ The metapoetic character of the poem can also be explicitly read in its first line (*I'll make a long sentence*) and in its last line (- - *when I wrote* in translation, and more clearly in the original: *kun täällä loppuun asti kirjoitan* "when I write here till the end") (See also Lotman, Lotman, Lotman 2009: 17–19).

As stated above, the poem opens up with a manifesto: *I'll make a long sentence*. This declaration is repeated in the second stanza, and later the speaker returns to the making of a sentence and the features of a sentence – that is to words, to writing and to speaking. Other occurrences of this semantic frame are *children's trumpetings* ("the trumpets of children's voices" in the original) and *the lead bullet that melts in a word or two*. The sentence turns out to be something material (*Sen lauseen läike, tuoksut, punnukset* in the original; *That sentence's shine scents, weights* in the translation): it can be seen, scented, weighed and heard. Poetry is not only a cognitive but a holistic process both for the speaker (poet) and the reader.

The addressee of the poem, the Muse, has two faces. In the beginning she is a wife or a beloved, with whom the speaker shares the bread at breakfast and the shouts of the children. The further the poem advances the more abstract the whole situation and the addressee become. The real beloved fades away and melts together with the abstract Muse, the personification of poetry: the sentence has a *body* it can carry and its breath is *silver*. At the very end the Muse is so abstract that the speaker can *pass through* her.

At the beginning of the poem the speaker is *wrapping in* things: *everything, everything I meet*. In the end, in stark contrast to this, there is an explosion in which the Muse dies, and only fragments and blood remain of her. Actually, in the last stanza the Muse seems to be composed of words (*the words will fill*)

²¹ Actually, the gender roles in the poem are not explicit. Yet we get many hints that the speaker is a man and his beloved a woman. In the second stanza, descriptions such as "the silver of your breath" bear resemblance to biblical descriptions in the Song of Solomon.

and time – or timelessness (*our thousand-year-old seconds explode*). She is simultaneously distant yet close (*and beyond the horizon I'll discern the lines on your palm*). She is omnipresent, yet dead at the same time. Clearly, the controversial or oxymoronic ways of describing her are an expression of the impossibility of defining her verbally.

This image of the Muse, combining words, time and death with a feminine muse figure, is a very (stereo)typical description of the birth of Poetry and the act of creation. We know the concept well from Romantic and Symbolist art. The (male) writer, addressing and pursuing the Muse and getting his inspiration from her, must win or destroy the Muse in the end. Only by death and destruction can he free himself from the Muse and find his own words, his own poems. His inspiration is symbolized in the destruction and explosion of its source, the Muse. Creation begins when the Muse is dead: *kun täällä loppuun asti kirjoitan* (“when I write here till the end”) in the original – the translation uses the past tense *when I wrote* for some reason. In the translation, the act of creation is over and the poem gets a somewhat resigned and melancholic ending. In the original, the writing goes on (“till the end”), which gives the reader a different impression of a dynamic poet, seized by inspiration, continuing his work.

The meaningfulness of all textual elements, not only words, constitutes the presumption of the perception of poetry (Lotman, 1976: 51). Maria-Kristiina Lotman, Mihhail Lotman and Rebekka Lotman (2008, 2009) approach the poetic text as consisting of three different languages: the natural language, the metre and the graphics of the text (which alludes to the iconic, visual elements of a text, its typography).²² The graphic elements in “Muse” are more frequent in the Finnish original than in the translation.

First, the first line of the second stanza in the Finnish original, “teen pitkän lauseen, pitkän, kaukaa” continues syntactically in the next line “- - kaukaa / kantakoon - -” (“I’ll make a long sentence, long, from far away / let it carry its body”). The division of two closely bound words in two separate lines shows the far-away distance typographically, leaving an empty space after the word “kaukaa”. Through alliteration in the first syllables of both words (“kau” and “kan”) an echoing effect across the lines is also apparent. Similarly, the verbs “täyttyvät” and “laajenee” (*will spread* and *explode* in the translation, slightly

²² The concept of texture, also used in literary studies meaning “the surface” of the text, includes metre and rhythm, whereas the Lotmans treat metre as a “poetic language” of its own.

different in meaning but fulfilling the same typographical function) are iconic in the line-endings (“ja valo laajenee” even forming its own line).

Earlier in the poem, the speaker has decided to compose a long sentence and described its features to the reader (“silvery”, “shining”, “scented”, “with trails and peaks”) but the act of creation has been only an intention so far; he has not had the words (*even if don’t know its meaning, not a word*) to write. Now, at the end of the poem and after the death of the Muse, he is still writing (and “till the end”, as the original says). It is worth noting that we do not gain access to his actual poem, which remains a secret: we only read about the preliminary stages of his writing process. The poem participates in a long tradition of metapoetic verse: art very often deals with itself (Jakobson 1981; Lotman, Lotman, Lotman 2008: 6). If we interpret “Muse” in a symbolic framework, its poem-to-be represents the essence of all art: it is always unfolding, always on the threshold, never “finished” for its readers and viewers.

The poem can also be read in the context of Tiihonen’s poetry in general. If so, the declaration to make *a long sentence, springy and spacious*, refers to his art of writing as a whole. In the light of his production, he seems to be aiming at exactly this: making springy and spacious poetry, using and moulding metre into rich rhythmic variations, combining it with the semantic structure of his poems.

For Tiihonen, usage of and experimenting with metre obviously provide him with a tool for enlarging his poetic repertoire. Different metric patterns are no cage for him, but rather an open space offering manifold possibilities for textual creation, play and allusion. In the abundantly non-metric context of Finnish poetry after the 1950s, Tiihonen’s voice has proved that metre and rhyme can be successfully used in contemporary Finnish poetry as well.

In the two examples discussed in this article, the concept of accentual metre has proved a useful tool for describing such metric structures that are realised as repetitive rhythmic patterns, but which are not based on certain syllable structures and numbers of syllables. From the viewpoint of semantics, the decisive question concerning metre and rhythm (like other structural elements in the text) is: What is the interpretative function and meaning of these elements? What does their analysis add to our understanding of the text? The value of metrical analysis to literary studies lies in the answers to these questions.

As already stated, the *sentence* (that is the Muse, the Art of Poetry in my interpretation) in the poem at hand is described as having many different

features. Interestingly enough, these features are very physical. In the second stanza, the speaker even ignores the cognitive side of art and creation: *so even if I don't know its meaning, not a word*. Instead, what matters is *sentence's shine, scents, weights*. The speaker pays attention to sensing (*I'll know your ringless ear, the silver of your breath*), to seeing (*and beyond the horizon I'll discern the lines on your palm*), to moving (*I'll go through you*) and to tasting (*I'll suck your blood from my fingers*). Also, there is a strong sense of hearing and of musicality in the repetitive structures of the poem. We get the impression that writing poetry and creating music are basically parallel processes: the poet uses words, alliteration, rhymes, repetitions and structural schemes in order to create an acoustic experience.

Clearly, getting closer to the mystery of poetry and the act of creating is, for the speaker, a very physical experience – in the first place, it is not made of words, meanings and cognition. Instead, it consists of movement, body, feelings and senses. The essence of this experience gets its expression and starts in feeling the metre and rhythm of poetry. Rhythm, also, is a Muse.

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Метр и смысл в двух стихотворениях Илпо Тийхонена

Стихотворный метр и семантика взаимодействуют разнообразным образом. Целью настоящей статьи является обсуждение взаимодействия метрической и семантической структуры в поэзии на материале творчества финского поэта Илпо Тийхонена. На протяжении всего его творческого пути, начавшегося в 1970-е годы, Тийхонен был одним из немногих современных финских поэтов, постоянно пользующихся традиционными размерами рифмованного стиха. Также рассматриваются проблемы, связанные с переводом метрической поэзии на другой язык, в данном случае при переводе с финского на английский.

Värsimõõt ja tähendus kahes Ilpo Tiihoneni luuletuses

Värsimõõt ja tähendus põimuvad mitmesugustel viisidel. Käesoleva artikli eesmärk on käsitleda meetriliste ja semantiliste struktuuride vastasmõjusid soome luuletaja Ilpo Tiihoneni teoste näitel. Oma loometee algusest 1970. aastatel on ta olnud üks väheseid kaasaegseid soome luuletajaid, kes on pidevalt kasutanud regulaarseid meetrilisi struktuure ja riimi. Samuti püütakse artiklis valgust heita küsimustele, mis tõstatuvad meetrilise luule tõlkimisel ühest keelest teise, antud juhul soome keelest inglise keelde.